

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

OCTOBER 1985

ONE DOLLAR



VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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Volume 46, Number 10

October 1985

Features

- 3 **Flight Day at Kiptopeke**
by Walter Smith & Karen Terwilliger
A visit to Virginia's preeminent bird banding area
- 7 **They Don't Whistle Much Anymore**
by Curtis Badger
Quail on Virginia's Eastern Shore is a different game
- 11 **Family Camping: An Autumn Discovery**
by Randall Shank
Fall offers Virginia campers some of the year's best weather and most colorful outdoor season
- 15 **Rockbridge County** *by Steven Shires*
A picture of some of Virginia's finest hunting and fishing
- 20 **The Northerns are Coming** *by Bob Gooch*
Big northern pike are now lurking in many waters—here's how to add to your creel
- 23 **The Greater Geese** *by Curtis Badger*
From virtual extinction to abundance, the snow geese are here—and here's how to hunt 'em
- 27 **You Never Know** *by Bob Gooch*
Floating down the river with shotgun in hand, the big question is what kind of duck will pop up next?
- 32 **October Journal**
Three books you'll want to read, successful fish smoking, a new antlerless deer limit, and much more
- 34 **Bird of the Month** *by John W. Taylor*
The Canada Goose

Cover

Green-winged Teal painting by Dale Totty, Richmond.
Back cover: photo by Dave Catlin, Jefferson City, Missouri

A Flight Day at Kiptopeke

The ferries no longer bring
people and traffic but the birds
continue to return to Kiptopeke.

by Walter Smith & Karen Terwilliger



Male Purple Finch

There is a tiny spot on the map of our state of Virginia which lies on the coast at the southern tip of Eastern Shore. It is called Kiptopeke, and rests today in what could be called "splendid isolation;" but this was not always so. In former days it was the northern terminus of the Little Creek to Kiptopeke Ferry, on a bustling, major north-south traffic route. Then came the advent of the eighth wonder of the world, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel complex. Suddenly, the traffic flow, and the people, bypassed Kiptopeke. It became just a place of memories.

Yet it always has been and continues to be, the focus of one of Nature's great phenomena, the fall migration of birds down the Atlantic Flyway. Hundreds of thousands of these nocturnal migrants, their movements triggered by the passage of cold fronts, stream south-eastward from the Arctic tundra and Canadian provinces.

As they reach the Atlantic Coast, instinct warns them against flying out over the ocean. Their point of greatest concentration on the southward flight is the Eastern Shore peninsula of Virginia. Because of the fantastic numbers of birds that funnel through the tip of this peninsula, a group of volunteer cooperators with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established a banding station at Kiptopeke.

The station was started in 1963 as part of a program known as Operation Recovery. The purpose of this program is to follow and sample the fall migration along the Atlantic Flyway. Data collected could well be used to help unlock some of the mysteries of bird migration.

Banding stations, such as Kiptopeke, help biologists learn about many aspects of bird migration, ecology and biology. Trends in the numbers, species of birds, timing and paths of migration, and longevity are some of the kinds of information learned through banding returns. A handful of masterbanders (highly trained individuals permitted by federal government) have worked the station for 20 years and provided valuable information on bird migration in Virginia.

The station is located in a comparatively narrow strip of woods along the bluff on the Bay side of the narrow peninsula tip. It is ideally located in that it encompasses one of the last substantial mature pine hardwood forests, before their 17-mile flight south across open waters of the Chesapeake. These protected woods, adjacent fields and



Female Purple Finch

Joel Arrington

shrub patches offer a last oasis to the migrants before continuing their journey across the bay or back up around the bay as is suspected for some species.

Birds are caught in a series of mist nets, each about 40 feet long and seven feet high. These nets are erected in lanes within, and along the edges of, the woods. Each day begins early at Kiptopeke, for the small nocturnal migrants have arrived both tired and hungry. It is during their early feeding movement through the woods that they fly into the nets and are captured. The

passing of this spectacle of birds goes practically unnoticed, and as we slumber, their relentless wings, and chirps are silent to our deaf ears.

As the nets are unfurled in the pre-dawn darkness, one can hear overhead the squeak of late-arriving warblers. In the woods faint rustlings are heard, as well as the sleepy chirps of thrushes. The masterbanders are aware that the birds are here in numbers, and must plan the day accordingly.

By daylight the birds are already hitting the nets, and experienced volun-



Prothonotary Warbler

R.C. Simpson



House Wren

R.C. Simpson

Operation Recovery 1982

<i>Sharp-Shinned Hawk</i>	<i>Yellow Warbler</i>
<i>Cooper's Hawk</i>	<i>Magnolia Warbler</i>
<i>American Kestrel</i>	<i>Cape May Warbler</i>
<i>Yellow-billed Cuckoo</i>	<i>Black-throated Blue Warbler</i>
<i>Black-billed Cuckoo</i>	<i>Yellow-rumped Warbler</i>
<i>Eastern Screech Owl</i>	<i>Black-throated Green Warbler</i>
<i>Northern Flicker</i>	<i>Blackburnian Warbler</i>
<i>Yellow-bellied Sapsucker</i>	<i>Chestnut-sided Warbler</i>
<i>Downy Woodpecker</i>	<i>Bay-breasted Warbler</i>
<i>Eastern Kingbird</i>	<i>Blackpoll Warbler</i>
<i>Great-crested Flycatcher</i>	<i>Pine Warbler</i>
<i>Eastern Phoebe</i>	<i>Prairie Warbler</i>
<i>Yellow-bellied Flycatcher</i>	<i>Western Palm Warbler</i>
<i>Acadian Flycatcher</i>	<i>Yellow Palm Warbler</i>
<i>Traill's Flycatcher</i>	<i>Ovenbird</i>
<i>Eastern Wood Pewee</i>	<i>Northern Waterthrush</i>
<i>Blue Jay</i>	<i>Connecticut Warbler</i>
<i>Carolina Chickadee</i>	<i>Mourning Warbler</i>
<i>Tufted Titmouse</i>	<i>Common Yellowthroat</i>
<i>Red-breasted Nuthatch</i>	<i>Yellow-breasted Chat</i>
<i>Brown Creeper</i>	<i>Hooded Warbler</i>
<i>House Wren</i>	<i>Wilson's Warbler</i>
<i>Winter Wren</i>	<i>Canada Warbler</i>
<i>Carolina Wren</i>	<i>American Redstart</i>
<i>Northern Mockingbird</i>	<i>Northern Oriole</i>
<i>Gray Catbird</i>	<i>Common Grackle</i>
<i>Brown Thrasher</i>	<i>Scarlet Tanager</i>
<i>American Robin</i>	<i>Summer Tanager</i>
<i>Wood Thrush</i>	<i>Northern Cardinal</i>
<i>Hermit Thrush</i>	<i>Rose-breasted Grosbeak</i>
<i>Swainson's Thrush</i>	<i>Blue Grosbeak</i>
<i>Gray-cheeked Thrush</i>	<i>Indigo Bunting</i>
<i>Veery</i>	<i>Purple Finch</i>
<i>Blue-gray Gnatcatcher</i>	<i>American Goldfinch</i>
<i>Golden-crowned Kinglet</i>	<i>Rufous-sided Towhee</i>
<i>Ruby-crowned Kinglet</i>	<i>Savannah Sparrow</i>
<i>Starling</i>	<i>Dark-eyed Junco</i>
<i>White-eyed Vireo</i>	<i>Chipping Sparrow</i>
<i>Solitary Vireo</i>	<i>Field Sparrow</i>
<i>Red-eyed Vireo</i>	<i>White-crowned Sparrow</i>
<i>Philadelphia Vireo</i>	<i>White-throated Sparrow</i>
<i>Warbling Vireo</i>	<i>Lincoln's Sparrow</i>
<i>Black & White Warbler</i>	<i>Swamp Sparrow</i>
<i>Prothonotary Warbler</i>	<i>Song Sparrow</i>
<i>Worm-eating Warbler</i>	
<i>Gold-winged Warbler</i>	<i>Total individuals</i> 12,042
<i>Blue-winged Warbler</i>	<i>Total Species</i> 95
<i>Tennessee Warbler</i>	<i>Net Hours</i> 19,363
<i>Orange-crowned Warbler</i>	<i>Repeats</i> 493
<i>Nashville Warbler</i>	<i>Returns</i> 8
<i>Northern Parula</i>	<i>Foreign recoveries</i> 12

teers continually walk the netted lanes with their mesh collecting bags to remove the birds and bring them to the banding area for processing by the banders. Records are required to reflect the date, number of the band placed on the leg of each bird, species, age and sex. In many instances wing measurements, weight and other pertinent information is recorded. Methods of determining this information have been acquired by experience over the years, and is constantly being updated. These records are all forwarded to the Banding Office in Laurel, Maryland.

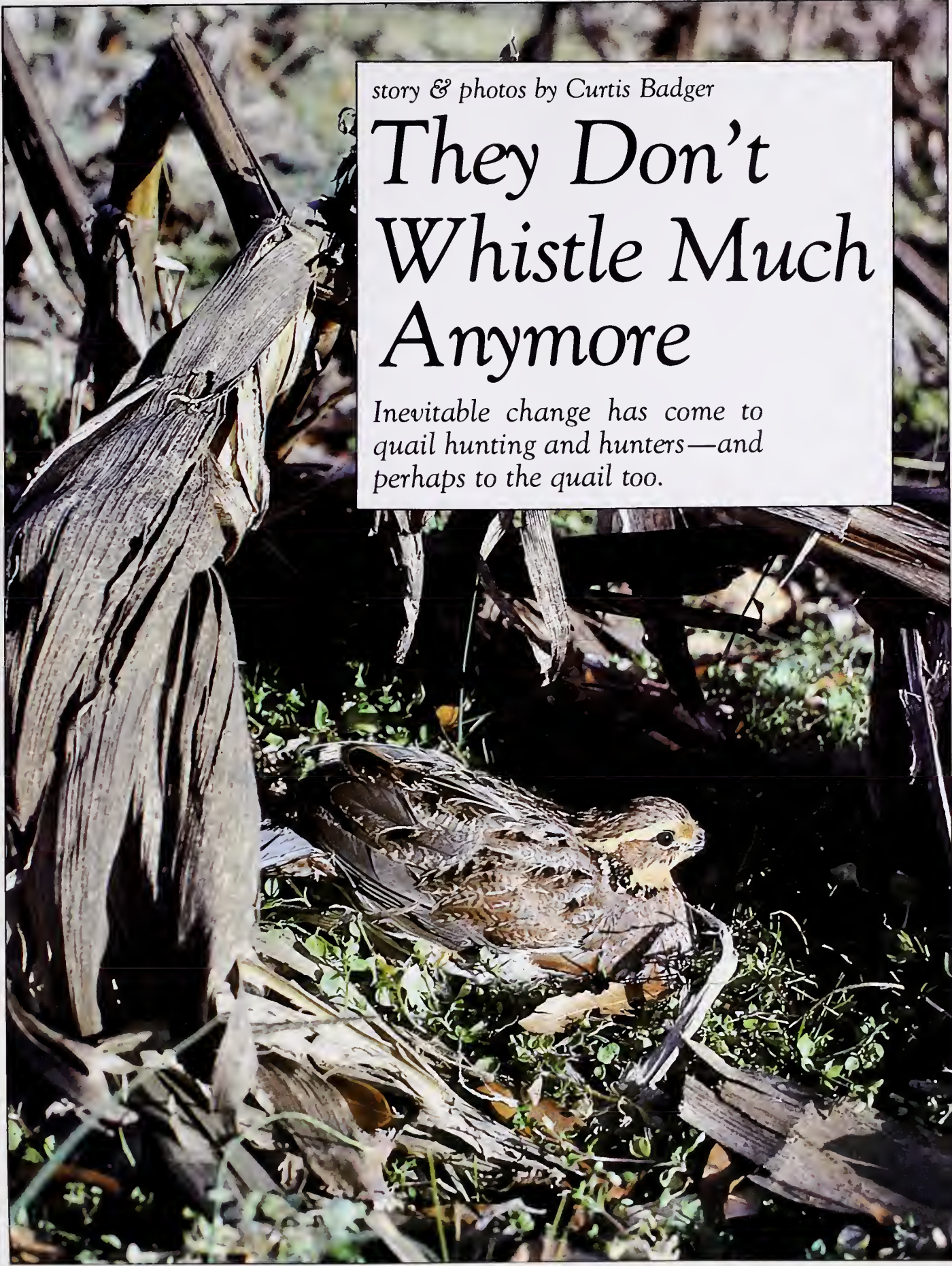
The Banding Office acts as the clearing house for all encounters with a banded bird. It informs both the bander of where, when and by whom found, and the finder of where, when and by whom banded. Kiptopeke birds have been encountered as far south as the West Indies, as far north as Canada and many points inbetween.

As the birders make constant rounds of the nets, they can never be sure what surprises may lie just around the corner. In the 20 years of operation almost 200,000 birds of 147 different species have been banded. Some of those species were western "strays," perhaps as much as 2,000 miles from their normal migratory range.

Each year banders are helped by as many as 100 volunteers from all over Virginia and the United States. The station is visited each year by students in programs ranging from elementary to graduate level. There is something quite special about observing young people absorbing the beauty of birds and discovering their unique habits and characteristics.

By late afternoon on a flight day, several hundred birds of perhaps 30 to 40 species have been banded. Workers are continually amazed by the fact that, of the roughly 100 species that are banded each fall, 50 of them were not known to migrate through eastern Virginia, until they flew into the nets. So much is still to be learned about our migrant birds, especially now, with the extensive timbering and pesticide use in their winter homes—south and central America. Perhaps this long term data will provide trend information that will help us detect the influences of the birds drastically changing wintering grounds in the tropics.

There is much to be said about the fall migration of birds through our state, and about those dedicated people who study and band them to learn more of their secrets and enlighten all of us who appreciate these feathered creatures. □

A photograph of a quail in a field of dry corn stalks and green weeds. The quail is in the lower center, facing right. It has brown and tan mottled feathers with a yellow stripe above its eye. The background is filled with dry, weathered corn husks and some green weeds.

story & photos by Curtis Badger

They Don't Whistle Much Anymore

*Inevitable change has come to
quail hunting and hunters—and
perhaps to the quail too.*



A lot of people will tell you that Joe Gibb was once one of the best wingshots on the Eastern Shore. For all I know, he still might be. The last time I talked with him he had just come back from a dove shoot, and although he was pushing ninety and his eyesight was failing, he could hold his own with hunters one-third his age.

Until he retired, Joe was a land surveyor for Accomack County. It was a job that got him out in the fields and woods and allowed him to do scouting for his first love, quail hunting. Although Joe's official job was locating and marking property boundaries, he was at the same time compiling a mental catalog of covey locations and promising coverts. So he knew the land, and he has a sure hand with the old Remington Autoloader, and during the winter months quail were frequently served at the family dinner table.

When I last spoke with him, Joe wasn't doing much quail shooting anymore. Walking the thickets took too much of a toll on his legs, and besides, his old sport had changed its complexion over the years.

"It used to be that quail were in the fields," he told me. "Now they stay in

the thickets where you can't get to them."

Like waterfowling, quail hunting has changed since the great days of the early- and mid-1900s. Now those days of hedgerows and open shots exist chiefly in the memories of elder statesmen like Joe, or in the romanticized world of wildfowl art.

"In the Twenties and Thirties farm machinery wasn't as efficient as it is now," Joe says. "There was always stubble left for cover. And there were hedgerows, miles of them, that always had coveys of birds. Shooting was in the open, mainly, and if the birds did go in the woods you could still find plenty of singles. Farmers cut wood for heat and raked pine shatters, so the woods were fairly open. When you got up a covey you could wait and listen for the birds to whistle, then you could go find them. Today the woods are thick and the birds are smarter. They don't whistle much anymore."

Perhaps I'm fortunate to have missed those days. If I had learned to shoot under those conditions, I might also have become disenchanted with quail hunting under 1980s conditions. I learned to shoot quail in thickets, in the

marshy lowlands of the Eastern Shore where shots were taken in split-second reflex action, at targets which instantly disappeared into thick folds of holly and pine.

So I can't feel disappointment or frustration at missing the great days of quail hunting. If I brought home two birds for the family freezer, to add to the painfully slow tally that would eventually provide a quail feast, I was unabashedly proud. And still am.

Quail hunting, I believe, is neither better nor worse than it was in Joe Gibbs's day—only different. The hunting techniques we use are different, our bird dogs are different. Even our expectations are different.

Just as farming practices of the 1980s differ from those of the 1930s, so too have our methods of quail hunting changed. Quail hunting has changed because farming has changed; in some ways the effects are obvious, and in some ways they are very subtle, but nonetheless profound.

Modern farmers, understandably seeking the greatest return on their investment, are wringing as much productivity as possible from every acre. Hedgerows are eliminated and



A good quail dog these days has to work heavy cover.

field margins tightly hug woods and roads, eliminating the wild buffer zone of volunteer plants that once sheltered and fed wildlife. Because harvesting equipment is more efficient, less grain is left behind for the birds to feed on. But most farmers turn their fields soon after the fall soybeans are cut anyway, quickly planting a winter cover crop.

So quail adapted to changing farming methods by moving to the woods, foraging for wild seed and grain. If they feed in fields now, it is only for a brief period, usually around sunrise and sunset.

And quail hunters have had to adapt along with their quarry. Instead of using far-ranging dogs that cover a lot of territory, the quail hunter of the 1980s will use a dog that has lots of spirit, but will hunt closer. Because most shots will be made in cover, the shotgun will have an open or improved cylinder choke, a short barrel, and it will be light in weight and well balanced.

Even our clothing has changed. There will be no more classic tweeds and corduroys for fashionable hunters. The modern hunter needs briar protection, and the hunting britches will be made

of tough canvas duck faced with nylon.

A few years ago we had a black and white setter that was probably one of the best bird dogs we ever owned. He had a great nose and he loved to hunt, but he had one serious drawback. He was bred from field trial stock, and he would run flat out from the time we let him out of his kennel until sunset. The dog refused to hunt close, and there was nothing we could do to persuade him to come in. In most of the areas we hunted, the birds were in thick woods, usually in the tangled growth of swampy lowlands. Under those conditions, we spent more time hunting for the dog than for quail. What good is a great bird dog if he's pointing quail in the next county?

In the best interest of our sanity and the dog's considerable talent, we traded him to a field trial breeder for a dog with a good nose but with less horsepower.

Given the hunting conditions most of us are faced with today, the bird dog that is a combination field trial champion and companionable hunting dog is rare. Many hunters prefer to avoid the field trial champs in favor of dogs that are bred a little less selectively, but

which are biddable and intelligent in the field. Many hunters I know are replacing their classy English pointers with Brittany spaniels and other similar breeds. Although the Brittany does not have the range of the pointer, it is a very willing and companionable dog. And most Brittannies are excellent retrievers, which is a definite plus when a quail falls in the honeysuckle.

Other changes and pressures upon the quail population have been more subtle, but potentially more troublesome. What effect has the widespread use of pesticides had on the birds' reproductive capability? What will be the long-term effect of their constant exposure to man-made chemicals? And what of the effect on animals farther up the food chain? Are we slowly poisoning our families by feeding them wild game?

An equally subtle change in the sport has been the product of social and economic changes; it has to do with how we use the land and how we perceive our role in our relationship with the land. My father tells me that when he was my age he could hunt from our home town to an adjoining town, a distance of about five miles, without hav-

ing to worry about trespassing on posted land. He knew all the farmers and the farmers knew him, and he was welcome to work the hedgerows with his setter.

Those farms were small, self-contained units that were probably doomed even as my father walked the hedgerows, victims of the changing economics of agriculture. There are few farms like them anymore. An unpretentious but well-kept frame house was the focal point of the farm, and it was not unlikely that three generations of farm family lived together under the same roof. A garden supplied fresh vegetables during the summer, and the pantry was well-stocked with canned tomatoes, beans, fruit and pickles. Chickens provided fresh eggs and Sunday dinner, and hogs were raised for the market and for stocking the smokehouse after the first hard frost. There were few basic needs that the farm did not provide. And in return it demanded hard work and long hours, and for the farmer to be completely successful, it required something more: a sense of respect and understanding. Most anyone who was willing to work hard could wrest a living from the land, but the best farmers were those who not only worked the land, but who were of the land, people for whom the land was an essential of life, just as vital as the blood that coursed through their veins.

There are few farmers like that anymore, and most of the small farms my father hunted have been bought by corporations, whose headquarters might not even be in the same county, or in the same state. If the frame house still exists, it is rented to someone who works in town: a school teacher, a banker, an insurance salesman. The chicken yard is gone, the barn and other outbuildings have buckled under to age and neglect. The house and yard, which were once the pulse of the farm, no longer have any connection to the land. The house could be in town, any town, and it would make no difference.

So the small farms that my father hunted have become minor contributors to a larger corporate effort. They have become part of the portfolio, as impersonal an abstract as a certificate of deposit or a municipal bond.

Most of the farms my father used to hunt are posted now. The classified section of our local newspaper carries an every-growing series of "Posted" ads:

most of which promise dire consequences for anyone apprehended hunting, trespassing, training dogs, or performing other such anti-social and unnatural acts on corporate land. A few of the larger corporations, with aggressive marketing departments, are selling hunting rights to their holdings, so if you can pay the price you can hunt your quail.

In defense of the agribusiness community, in many cases hunters have earned the posted signs and threatening advertisements. When a farmer has his crops flattened by four-wheel drive vehicles, his fence torn down, his livestock fired upon, and his sleep interrupted by the gunfire of jacklighters, then who can blame him for posting his land? Twenty-five hunters might have used his land previously, treating it with respect, but it is the one hunter who ignores hunting laws, ethics, and simple good-neighborliness that earns the wrath of the landowner for all hunters. I can think of no better reason for hunter education programs in which not only gun safety is taught, but hunting ethics and morality as well.

The common denominator in all of this is land ethics and how we perceive our relationship with the land. When farms were small and the lives of the farm families were both literally and figuratively tied to the land, hunters were less likely to abuse the privilege of access. A family's farm was an extension of their lives; it was a personal expression of their beliefs and dreams. A guest would be no more likely to leave his trash along the south hedgerow than in the host's living room. It was a simple matter of good manners and respect for the property and rights of others. Chances are you knew the farmer, perhaps went to the same church as his family, shopped in the same stores, were members of the same civic organizations. To abuse his land would be to insult him, and his neighbors, and his community. The behavior of the guest was governed by a code of ethics much stronger and more enforceable than any legal ordinance.

The corporate farm, with headquarters in a glass-walled office building in the city, enjoys no such intimate bond between the owners and the land. The land has become mere property, a commodity whose value is its contribution to the corporate profit-loss statement. It is as impersonal as the con-

crete bridge abutment that attracts the graffiti of spray can artists, and it is treated accordingly.

If there is to be land to hunt in the future, we must learn to change our attitudes toward the land. No matter whether the farm is owned by a family or a corporation, all of us, in a very real sense, are stewards of the land, and we must learn to use it without using it up.

Instead of walking hedgerow to hedgerow, farm to farm, the quail hunter of the 1980s is more likely to be motorized. Don Sparrow is one of the most successful quail hunters I know. Don is assistant manager of a supermarket and a wildlife artist, and he spends his spare hours hunting quail on the Eastern Shore. He has two beautiful pointers that are not only superb on a hunt, but they have an impressive collection of field trial trophies. Don is a good quail hunter because he works at it. His dogs are well-trained, and he has developed a diplomatic touch in coaxing landowners into extending hunting rights.

Don burns a lot of gas on a quail hunt. He still hunts in the time-honored, farm-to-farm method, but there may be a gap of six or seven miles between farms. So it's everyone out of the truck for a circle around the field, then pack up and head for the next. It's not exactly the contemplative sport of long walks and quiet hours afield, but it's the only way to be successful if you want quail.

A generation ago, my father would begin his hunt at the nearest farm, and he could cross a half-dozen or more property lines in the course of the hunt. He would walk from farm to farm, sometimes stopping at a farm house for a cold drink or lunch. Today's quail hunter travels by pickup truck and stops for lunch at McDonald's.

And who is to say which method is best? Outside of shooting preserves, the modern hunter is not likely to find conditions which resemble those my father and Joe Gibb knew. Quail hunting in the 1980s is a different sport. But though the methods differ, the rewards are the same. The thrill of the covey-rise, that breath-taking moment when all you have learned about shooting is compressed into a fraction-of-a-second reflex, is an indelible part of the sport. And no matter how many changes we see over the years, as long as there are quail, this moment will live. □

FAMILY CAMPING

An Autumn Discovery

story & photos by Randall Shank



The weather is cool and comfortable, the crush of people is over and the woods are stunning in their color—what better time to take a camping trip?

Standing on a limestone outcropping from the top of the Blue Ridge, we watched three hawks catch the afternoon thermal and soar gracefully below us. Suddenly, the smaller buteo closed its wings and dive-bombed the larger birds, which merely shifted in one direction to avoid the attack. In a few seconds, the wind carried the birds out of our view.

The day was a glorious one, with the sky a clear blue and the leaves on the trees just starting to turn to yellows, reds and oranges. The northeast winds

that had ushered in the hawk migration also brought with it a cleansing of the summer haze that hangs over the mountains, and on this day we could almost see forever. Our children sat on the rocks and curiously inspected an ant that was attempting to carry away the remains of a piece of sandwich that had fallen to the rock from our lunch. Jonathan, our youngest son, strategically placed a stick across a pocket of water in the rock, so that the ant could cross the water with its find.

Erin, our six-year-old daughter,

FAMILY CAMPING

pointed to a buzzard as it floated effortlessly by our viewing stand. And then for awhile, we lay on the warm stones with our noses feeling the cool air, and we closed our eyes and listened to the sounds of the wind. For a moment we were a part of the wind and the mountain; and the wind and the mountain were a part of us.

Later that afternoon, we caught a glimpse of a deer that had come into the nearby meadow to feed. The breeze in the trees seemed to whisper to the deer and us that Indian summer was passing, and winter was on its way.

As we walked out of the meadow, the kids climbed an old twisted apple tree—a remnant from the time that the hollows and hills were populated with mountain folks—and the children picked small black spotted apples that we would eat with our sausage the next morning. Heading back to camp, we gathered dead fallen branches for firewood. The children picked up pieces of wood for the campfire that would later warm us into the autumn night.

There is no better time of year than autumn to be in the outdoors, and the best way that I know for a family to explore the outdoor experience is by family camping. Camping in the fall promises many warm days but cooler nights. After a day of hiking and exploring, the winds of autumn guarantee an appetite for camp cooking.

A favorite and easy supper menu is hamburger, potatoes, and carrots wrapped in foil and placed on the hot coals of either charcoal or wood. The children enjoy helping to cook dinner as they wrap the hamburger patties and then by cooking the dish on the hot coals. Hot chocolate on a cool night warms a youngster's tummy. Camp menus can be varied, though. Other dinner items that we enjoy are barbecued chicken, steak and baked potatoes, and shish kebab. For breakfast we eat bacon and eggs, or sausage and apples, or a combination of items that may include oatmeal, grits, cereal, juice and coffee. Living outdoors for a few days stimulates the appetite, and we are prepared for our meals. Lunches are generally light since we are often on the trail or fishing. We settle for sandwiches, crackers, cheese and a cool beverage.

Summer camping insures warmth. Fall camping does not. The days can be

warm and pleasant or sweatshirt cool. Some extra equipment and clothing is required. On our autumn trips our family includes the following clothing items for a weekend excursion (per person): a pair of long and short pants, a flannel shirt and a short sleeved shirt, a change in underwear, a pair of cotton socks and a pair of wool socks, hiking shoes and a lightweight pair of shoes to sit around camp in, a warm sweater or sweatshirt, a windbreaker or rain jacket, gloves, and a hat. Kids will need extra clothes because they will get dirtier and wetter than most adults.

Compared to many camping families, our camping gear is pretty basic—but functional. The fall family camper can travel light with just a rainfly and a tent or the family can go with a fully

equipped recreation vehicle. We are now camping with a small light-weight pop-up tent camper that sleeps four. We pull it with our small compact car. Other gear that we find essential and that we take with us includes: warm sleeping bags and extra blankets if necessary, foam mattresses (air mattresses are out in the fall—too cold), pillows, a portable gas stove, a battery operated or a gas operated lantern, games for the kids, camp stools and chairs, pots and pans for cooking, disposable plates and cups, and other cooking items such as utensils, soaps, spices and foil. Make a list before you go of items that you think you will need, and then check each item off before you go.

One of our purposes of camping is to be outside and to enjoy what nature has to offer. We fill our daypacks with sandwiches, a camera, and for our daughter, a favorite doll. Our days are spent hiking and exploring trails in the mountains.

When our children were very young, we often carried them on our backs when we went hiking. Now that they are older, we have to try and keep up with them on the trail. We pick trails that are not too difficult but are interesting. The trails should take us to either a creek or some rocks to climb on.

Our hikes are educational. We teach our children to follow the white blazes that are on the trees to guide us. When Jonathan accidentally brushes his arm against a prickly stinging plant, we show him some jewelweed. The mountain remedy of rubbing the succulent juices of this plant on his irritated arm quickly makes him feel better (perhaps just psychologically), and at the same time he learns how to identify a new plant—jewelweed.

The mountain trail to the rocks at Bearfence Mountain opens a new world to our children. They explore hollow logs and learn that dead trees provide homes for raccoons and other animals. Erin, who has just learned to read, finds enjoyment in reading the trail maps and markers to help us make a decision on which route to take. Old dead, rotten, chestnut trees provide the opportunity for a lesson in mountain botany as we discuss the blight that has plagued the trees over the years. A chipmunk dashing over the leaves barks

“There is no better time of year than autumn to be in the outdoors, and the best way that I know for a family to explore and enjoy the outdoor experience is by family camping.”

FAMILY CAMPING



(Top) Exploring is one of many activities for children on a family camping trip.
(Bottom) This looks like a likely spot to come back to with the fishing rods.



a warning at us, and we discuss the small rodent's preparations for winter.

As we approach the end of the trail the children begin a mad scramble up and over something that we do not have at our home in Tidewater Virginia—rocks. Nature has set up a natural playground of crevices, pitches, and climbs for the kids. The children are loving every minute of the experience.

The visit on the big boulders affords us a few moments of instruction concerning basic safety precautions such as maintaining three points on the rocks at all times. Two feet and one hand on the rocks at one time is an example. We look at the lichens, small trees, and grasses that are growing from the stones. The rocks provide a living laboratory to spark the interest of the children in geology. But mostly we climb and scramble and have fun. And when we reach the top, we stop and pause to have a picnic lunch with the world at our feet.

Family camping gives us the opportunity to experience and enjoy this together. The day is a fleeting moment as our children grow up, that we as a family come together as one. The outdoors brings us closer to one another as we mutually, hand in hand, see what nature has to offer. The people we meet along the way share a certain bond with us, for they know as we know, that autumn is a special time of year.

Fall is a time of transition and change. The oranges and reds of the trees mirror the bright orange spawning colors of the brook trout. Before the scarcity of winter, wildlife populations are at their highest level and offer the initiated a chance to see wild animals like no other time of year. Beginning in September, hundreds and then thousands of hawks can be seen riding the thermals along the Blue Ridge. Fluttering along will be just as many monarch butterflies. On the shore, flock after flock of Canada geese begin arriving in Virginia in October to spend the winter. Deer are beginning the rut, and an October evening is the best time of year to see deer feeding in a distant meadow.

Virginia is blessed with a varied climate and terrain. From the seashore to the mountains, fall family camping can be enjoyed. On the coast, the campgrounds on the Eastern Shore, Northern Neck, and Virginia Beach areas

FAMILY CAMPING



Maybe the best part of the day, popcorn and ghost stories around the campfire.

can be the base camp for family fun on the water while in pursuit of spot, flounder, or that big bluefish. In the Piedmont area there are lots of campgrounds to choose from on Smith Mountain Lake, Philpott Reservoir, and in most of the state parks. Be sure to call ahead to make sure on the closing date of your favorite campground. Closing dates will vary from year to year. All of these campgrounds offer a starting point for a wide variety of outdoor experiences.

The mountains of Virginia, particularly in the national forest which offer the outdoor enthusiast a chance to go fishing, hunting, and hiking, are an excellent choice for an area of the state to go camping in the fall. The autumn months invite the camping family to spend some time anywhere along the top of the Blue Ridge from Front Royal to Fancy Gap. Anywhere in these mountains the trails are many, the views splendid, and trout fishing in the creeks and rivers can be excellent.

After spending a day in the outdoors when camping, the whole family sits around the campfire until bedtime. We tell ghost stories, cook marshmallows, sing songs, discuss the discoveries of the day, and just sit back and listen to the wind in the trees. Before tucking the children in their sleeping bags for the night, we step away from the fire and gaze into the sky where the Milky Way and millions of stars shine.

The brilliance of the stars reinforces the idea that family camping is the way for the whole family to get outdoors during the most splendid time of year. Virginia's natural playground from the beaches to the Appalachians is waiting to be explored and studied. On just a weekend trip the family can immerse themselves in activities that cannot be done at home.

By being outside in the early morning when the sun rises, and then by making the effort to learn more about the waters, the trees, the climate, and wild animals of the outdoors during the day and night, then the entire family can begin to understand more about the rhythms of the earth. And as we learn more about the intricacies of nature, we learn more about ourselves. There is no better time to begin this discovery than with an autumn camping trip. □

Rockbridge County

A pictorial essay on this land
of hunting and fishing.

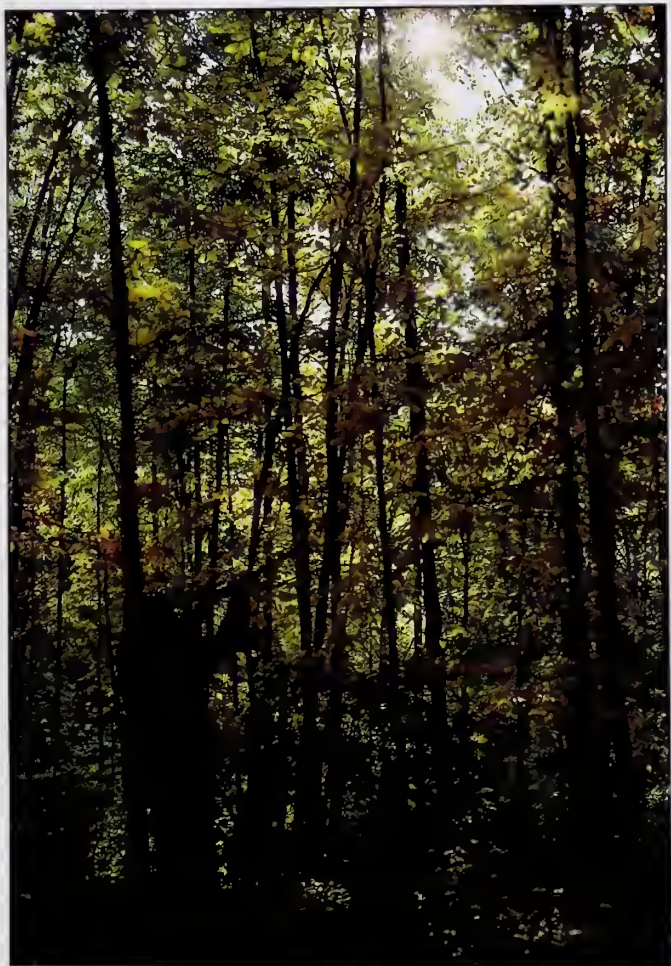
story & photos by Steven Shires





In the saddle of the Blue Ridge Mountains and Alleghany Mountains lies Rockbridge County. Vast amounts of public land provided by the Virginia Game Commission and national forests allow the outdoorsman unlimited opportunity. Fishermen can catch trout at Goshen Pass in the upper Maury River or Irish Creek where it wanders through the George Washington National Forest. South River is fast becoming a popular place for both trout and fishermen. If warm water fish are more your style, grab your rod and a can of bait and head on down to the James River just south of Natural Bridge Station.

For hunters the list is endless for public areas to hunt. The Game Commission's Goshen Wildlife Management Area and Little North Mountainland offer thousands of acres on the northwestern side of the county. This area adjoins the George Washington National Forest. The George Washington and Jefferson National Forest lie along the entire eastern side with the Blue Ridge Parkway as the county line. □



*"Man has lived, and in some places
still lives, in harmony with nature,
and the hunter and angler still cling
to strong lines that connect us with
the harmonious past."*

— C.H.D. Clarke





The Northerns are Coming

No piker this one, here's a
fish designed to attack your bait.

by Bob Gooch

When the northern pike moved south to join the pike family of Virginia, it received a warmer welcome than did the federal troops who marched on Richmond over a century ago. Even so, it does not seem to have been completely accepted by Old Dominion anglers who appear satisfied with a steady diet of bass, trout, and panfish.

But before examining the pike's status in Virginia, let's take a look at this intruder from the north.

Because it is closely related to the chain pickerel, a true native of Virginia waters, the pike might be best brought into focus by comparing it with the pickerel. Place the two fish side by side and they are surprisingly similar. Both fish are long and round, a feature which often prompts northern anglers to refer to the pike as "snake." The anal and dorsal fins on both fish are set well back on the body and the tail fin is forked. Both fish have long, flat, duck-billed jaws and mouths lined with sharp teeth. Both are also green in color though the pickerel has tinges of yellow.

Now look for the differences, the distinguishing features. The most obvious, the one that most anglers depend upon, is the marking of the fish. The pike's green flanks are flecked with white, elongated, bean markings whereas the pickerel is covered with chain or mesh

markings, hence its name chain pickerel. Markings alone should set the pike apart. No other member of the pike family has the white "beans" on its flanks.

If for some reason doubt still exists, turn to the cheek and gill covers. Only the upper half of the pike's gill covers are scaled whereas the entire gill cover of the pickerel is scaled. The cheek covers of both the pike and pickerel are fully scaled.

Both fish have a pugnacious, often volatile personality, that seems to explode at the slightest provocation. This trait makes the pike the first choice of many northern anglers. My experiences with both the chain pickerel and the pike, however, indicate the pike is a more moody fish, one that sometimes refuses to hit the best presented offerings of experienced anglers. Watching a trophy pike follow your lure all the way to the boat only to disappear beneath it can be a frustrating experience. There are times, usually during the summer months, when pike all but refuse to strike. Some anglers insist their mouths get sore, but biologists generally question this.

The pike's strike at a moving lure or bait can be pure lightning, awesome, almost unnerving. It may take a half dead minnow, however, munch on it and swallow it with no initial hint to the angler that he has a fish.

No great fighter, the pike will leap

spectacularly, cracking the surface to send silvery spray above the surface and forming a striking U with its long body before crashing back to the water. I've been fortunate enough to capture a couple of those fleeting pieces of drama on film.

Northern pike grow big—and that is one of its attractions.

"Pike are trophy fish here," Ray Danis told fellow Virginia angler Jerry Almy and me as we fished for the big pike out of his lodge on Shannon Lake in Quebec.

The world record pike has stood for a long time. The 46-pound, 2-ounce fish was caught in New York's Sacandaga Reservoir on September 15, 1940. That record is constantly threatened with numerous fish in the 35- to 45-pound range being landed just about every fishing season. A 35-pound northern pike with its green body and spectacular white bean markings makes a handsome mount. No wonder it is a trophy fish.

So far no Virginia pike has threatened the world record, but the state historic record is a respectable fish, one worthy of a visit to the taxidermist. The 22-pound, 9-ounce fish was wrestled from Occoquan Reservoir by Bill Dobbs in 1976. It's interesting to note that both the world record and the Virginia record came from impounded waters—reservoirs.

As is true of the world record, the



Illustration by Virgil A. Beck

Virginia record is constantly being threatened also, and undoubtedly some new record fish are finning Old Dominion waters. Is there a new world record somewhere out there in the state? I doubt it—not at the present at least.

It takes a 6-pound pike for an angler to earn a Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries citation, and so far this year (through September) 26 anglers have caught citation fish. Most are in the 8- to 10-pound range, but some 15 pounders are checked in every season.

As its name indicates, the pike is a northern fish, in fact the most northern member of the pike family. It is found across the northern half of North America and Eurasia with its native range extending south to approximately latitude 39. Modern fishery management, however, has successfully introduced the fish to southern states such as Georgia, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona. The big pike do not often reproduce in these southern waters, but hatchery-reared fish do well.

Hatchery-reared pike have been released in a number of Virginia waters, but over the years several have come to the front as pike fishing waters. These are lakes that appear most often on listings of those that produce citation fish.

True to its name, the northern pike has shown a preference for lakes in the northern half of Virginia. Record-producing Occoquan appears most frequently on the citation listings. This 1,700-acre lake in Prince William County is part of the Fairfax County water supply system and it is open to properly licensed Virginia anglers. There is a marina on the lake and boat launching facilities. It gives up citation northern pike every season.

Small Beaver Creek Lake in Albemarle County is another body of water that gives up good pike, season after season. The Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries maintains a boat launching ramp on the lake. Nearby in neighboring Orange County is Orange County Lake, owned and managed by the Commission. Pike from this 124-acre lake appear frequently on the citation listings. The Commission maintains a launching ramp on the lake. Gasoline motors are prohibited on both of these small lakes, but electric motors are allowed.

One small southside Virginia lake that dares to defy the pike's apparent preference for more northern waters is 220-acre Martinsville Reservoir in Henry County. It

is part of the water supply system of the city of Martinsville, and there is a small fee for private boats. Outboards larger than 6 horsepower are not allowed. Lee Hall Reservoir, a 400-acre reservoir in the Newport News City water supply system, has produced a few citation pike and it shows promise. Commission fishery biologists have been experimenting with stocking larger pike in this lake in an effort to hold down the predator loss. The city of Newport News maintains a boat launching ramp for which there is a small fee.

These are not the only waters that have received releases of hatchery pike in recent years, but they have proved the most productive for anglers.

The minimum size limit on Virginia pike is 20 inches and the daily creel limit is two. A 20-inch pike is not a big fish in the eyes of the experienced pike fishermen, but it can be a prize taken from Virginia waters by the angler who has not previously encountered the pike.

There are no closed seasons on northern pike, and while spring and fall are probably the best seasons some good fish are taken during the summer months. In 1983, not a good pike fishing year in the Old Dominion, three of the six citation pike were caught in August. One was caught in March, one in October and one in December. Perhaps 1980 was a better year, a more typical one. Virginia anglers took 16 citation pike that year, and eight of them were taken in June, July, and August. September produced a lone fish. May was also a good month with five citation fish being registered. A pair was caught in April. Probably the best time to go pike fishing in Virginia is when you have the opportunity.

Some sizeable pike are landed on surprisingly light tackle, but light tackle is not a general recommendation. It's not because the fish cannot be handled on light tackle. The problem is setting the hook. The tough, bony mouth of the pike is hard to drive a hook into, and you need a rod with plenty of backbone to do so. I was fishing a small lake in Alaska a few years ago and getting all kinds of action on a variety of lures, but I wasn't landing many fish. The problem was obvious. I couldn't drive the hooks home with the flexible spinning rod I was fishing with.

Also vital to pike fishing is a short wire leader. I've lost some good pike when their sharp teeth sliced through my monofilament line. Modern wire leaders are flexible and a big improvement over those of yesteryear. Fishing

for pike without one is all but foolhardy.

Recognize these two requirements in your tackle and you have a wide selection of casting or spinning tackle to choose from.

As is true to all members of the pike family, the northern pike loves weeds. Weed beds flourish in most waters from spring until well into the fall, and there is no better place to go fishing for pike. Weeds grow best in reasonably shallow water, however, and during periods of extremely hot weather the pike may desert the weeds temporarily for the cool comfort of deeper water.

"Just find a weed bed and cast a spoon into it," was the advice I received on my first trip north for pike. That was before the fish were introduced to Virginia a couple of decades ago.

Spoons and weed beds have provided the combination that has produced for pike fishermen for centuries, and it is still productive. For best results dress the spoon up a little. In the old days a tip of pork rind was the favorite, but today there is a wide variety of rubber imitations. Colors in the spoons are probably not that important, but red and white has been popular for generations—and still are.

Modern minnowlike lures such as the Rebel and Rapala are also good in those weed beds.

Underwater lures such as spoons are usually the most productive, but for some real thrills try working a surface lure over a weed bed some bright spring or summer morning. The jolt of a pike slamming your topwater lure will jar you to your toes—and the thrill will last forever.

If artificial lures don't produce, there is nothing wrong with going with live minnows, and don't skimp on the size of the minnows. The pike has a big appetite and it likes a good mouthful. I've seen some anglers fish 10-inch suckers for big pike. When fishing live minnows over weed beds, I like to use a float and suspend the bait just above the crowns of the weeds. In open water, however, you can forego the float and let the minnow roam.

The northern pike completes the pike family in Virginia. Native to the state are the chain and little redbfin pickerel, and the muskellunge, like the pike, has been introduced. Possibly absent is the little grass pickerel, insignificant from an angling point of view.

Fishing in Virginia is more interesting because of the arrival of the northern pike, limited though its numbers may be. □

On one of the coldest mornings of last January, I was snuggled under a thin white sheet in a cutover corn field on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Three days of subfreezing weather had left the ground rock hard, and crusty patches of old snow were scattered around the field like random flecks of frosting on a cake.

I was doing my best to imitate a patch of aging snow, wondering why I had not brought along a couple of heavy white blankets to hide under, instead of this one thin sheet. I shivered and watched the two dozen snow goose

decoys scattered thirty yards out. The rig looked okay to me. If I were a goose, I wouldn't mind dropping in for a visit. To my left, my hunting partner lay under a similar white sheet, occasionally sounding a brief note on his goose call.

We heard the flock a long way out. The morning air was still and their voices carried well. They had gotten up from the shallow bay that separates the mainland from the Atlantic barrier island chain that fringes the eastern shore, and they flew low over the saltmarsh that lay beyond our field. The geese had been using the field regu-

larly, and they came at it like they owned it. They would not bother to gain much altitude on the short flight over the saltmarsh, and when they approached the field they would come in low over the pine row that separates the cultivated land from the high marsh.

They came like pale ghosts dropping out of a grey sky, gliding over the pines with their black-tipped wings set, barking to each other in a staccato call—"houck, houck"—that someone once told me sounds like a Canada goose with a German accent. There were at least three dozen birds in this flight, and as they cleared the pine row

The Greater Geese



Flying low over the saltmarsh and heading for your decoys come the greater snow geese, a bird "from beyond the north wind."

story & photos by Curtis Badger

we stood and fired, the adrenaline wiping out all thoughts of cold and discomfort. Three birds fell onto the frozen ground and we retrieved them with the excitement of kids on their first hunt. These were greater snow geese, special birds who had come from beyond the north winds, who had been bred far north of the summer homes of other waterfowl on the island of the Arctic archipelago. They had been hunted and worshipped by the Eskimo, they had been a staple in the diet of the American colonists, and at the beginning of this century they had almost become extinct. And so these great white birds seemed all the more like pale ghosts, noble apparitions full of mystery and wonder. We took our three birds and left the field to later flights, and we drove to a local restaurant for coffee and breakfast, and to reflect on the morning hunt.

Many people consider the Canada goose the noblest of waterfowl. It is the largest goose, arguably the most beautiful, and it is blessed with a melodious, haunting call that can send shivers up the spine.

But consider the greater snow goose, the bird of the far north who makes Virginia's coastline its winter home. The bird's scientific name seems particularly apropos: *Hypoborea*, which means "from beyond the north wind." Unlike its smaller relative, the lesser snow goose, which nests in the Northwest Territories, the greater snow nests farther north in Greenland and in the Arctic islands. While in the fall the lesser snows funnel down the Central and Mississippi Flyways to the Gulf of Mexico, the greater snows drift downward through eastern Canada, New England, and New Jersey to the coastal saltmarshes of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina.

Although greater snow geese nearly became extinct at the turn of the century, now they come to these areas by the tens of thousands each winter. In

Once on the brink of extinction, snow geese now abound in Virginia.





these coastal saltmarshes they find their favorite food, cordgrass, and development of a system of national wildlife refuges along this wintering ground has provided the birds a sanctuary amid their favorite habitat.

Each year, Jim Kenyon watches the big white birds flock by the thousands to the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge marsh impoundments. The refuge, which is a long passing shot from the Atlantic Ocean, has proved a boon to the snow goose, an oasis in an environment that can be harsh. "The refuge system provides food and a resting place," says Kenyon, outdoor recreation planner at the Chincoteague Refuge. "The population is very concentrated, but it seems to be stable now. The geese seem very healthy."

It hasn't always been that way. There were reportedly hundreds of thousands of greater snows in the Atlantic Flyway when America was a young colony, and there are stories that the snows helped the colonists avoid starvation during harsh winters along the coast. But by the late 1800s, the population had dwindled drastically. A census in 1902 indicated that there were only 2,000 to 3,000 of the waterfowl remaining. Bag limits were established, and other controls were instituted, but they had little effect. In 1918, when the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was passed, snow goose hunting was banned entirely.

The population began to rebound, but it did so very slowly. By 1931 there were still only 10,000 greater snows in existence, but at least ornithologists no longer feared the imminent demise of the species. During the middle years of this century the population began to increase strongly, and in 1975, with an estimated 200,000 birds in the Atlantic Flyway, snow geese once again became legal game.

Although the birds have been hunted legally for nearly ten years, the population has continued to grow and now is thought to have stabilized at a quarter of a million birds. Many scientists believe the population swings of this great bird provide evidence that the effect of sport hunting on a species has less impact than many people, especially anti-hunting advocates, give it credit for. Most biologists today believe the impact of sport hunting is pretty far down the list, trailing such factors as breeding conditions, destruction of habitat and the influence of toxic chemicals in the environment.

"There were three factors involved in the decline of the greater snow goose

in the late 1800s," says Kenyon. "The birds nest in the Arctic Circle, where the breeding season is short and conditions are not always ideal. For several years in succession, the geese had poor nesting seasons. Then, in the south, their wintering habitat was being destroyed as wetlands were being drained and filled to make room for cities and farms. Finally, there were no legal limits or controls on hunting the birds."

A critical factor for the greater snow goose remains the breeding success during the short Arctic summer. The birds arrive in late May or early June and begin nesting in about two weeks. Incubation takes another two weeks, and the young birds make their first flights in mid-August.

Obviously, timing is crucial. When the birds arrive in the Arctic, conditions are still winter-like, with snow covering almost all the ground. If bad weather delays nesting for as much as two weeks, the birds will not nest at all. Even if nesting is delayed for only one week, the size of the clutch will be reduced.

Breeding habitat is also crucial to the survival of the birds. If there are too many nesting birds for the habitat to support, the young birds, or the late arrivals, are forced to nest in marginal habitat where they are vulnerable to predators. The birds seem to walk a biological tightrope, where slight variations in seasonal conditions, habitat, and density of population can make the population of the species suddenly plummet.

Greater Snows, Lesser Snows and Blues

Waterfowl experts have rarely been able to reach a consensus on the identity of greater snow geese, lesser snow geese, and the blue goose. Some authorities insist that all snow geese are the same species, that color variations indicate only different color phases of the same bird.

The issue is confusing. Consider that the lesser snow goose and the so-called blue goose interbreed freely. The immature greater snow goose, with its slate-colored plumage, closely resembles the blue goose. And all the birds share similar habitat.

Ornithologist F.G. Cooch, in *Waterfowl Tomorrow*, an anthology published by the Department of the Interior in 1964, cleared matters somewhat when he explained that the lesser snow goose and the blue goose are indeed the same bird, the latter being a color phase of

the former. Dr. Cooch, a Canadian wildlife biologist who spent ten years studying snow geese, concluded that the blue phase birds are increasing at the rate of two percent a year, at the expense of the white phase birds, so the trend toward blue phase lesser snow geese should continue.

The greater snow goose, said Dr. Cooch, is a separate subspecies, closely related to the lesser snow but distinct from it. The greater snow has no blue phase, but immature birds have a dusky, slate color which adds to the confusion.

Although the birds are difficult to distinguish visually, there are three major factors which make the greater snow goose unique. Most obvious is the bird's size. The lesser snow weighs four to six pounds, and greater snows have been known to top ten pounds.

Second, greater snows follow a very specialized migration itinerary. These are birds of the Arctic and sub-Arctic islands, one of the few species of North American waterfowl that do not breed on the mainland. Each fall they follow a familiar flight plan down the Atlantic coast to their wintering grounds on the Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina saltmarshes.

Third, these are birds of the seacoast. Few of them range inland; most prefer the shallow bays that separate the mainland from the barrier island chains that fringe these mid-Atlantic states. Here they dine on saltmarsh cordgrass, which they pry from the marsh with their bills. A flock of greater snows can turn a saltmarsh into a muddy mess in a night of feeding. Unlike Canada geese, greater snows are not grazers and grain eaters. Instead they are grubbers and probers.

One look at a saltmarsh after a snow goose banquet, and you'll believe a flock of geese could destroy more wetlands than a bulldozer and dragline. Fortunately, the damage is usually not as severe as it looks; after sustaining a flock of geese during the winter, the marsh will regenerate during the summer and be ready for another fall onslaught.

I have watched snow geese feed in a particular area of marsh on Assateague Island each winter for twelve years. By winter's end the marsh looks completely ravaged, but by early summer is lush and green again. The marsh has not changed appreciably over the years despite the annual feasting of the snows.

There is evidence, too, that the greater snows are increasingly adopt-

ing the feeding habits of the Canadas and lesser snows. It is no longer uncommon to see flocks of great snows in cutover corn and soybean fields, especially if the fields are adjacent to a saltmarsh and they have tender shoots of winter wheat emerging.

This means bad news for the farmers and good news for hunters, especially those in southeastern Virginia and North Carolina, where Canada geese have been in short supply. Greater snows are easier than Canadas to decoy; white, one-gallon bleach jugs make excellent decoys, and when shoved caps-down into the ground they assume a passable feeding posture. A quick foraging trip to the local laundromats should outfit you with a decoy rig, and the price will certainly be right.

Ironically, this change in feeding habits by the greater snows should benefit the species as well as the hunter. Certainly the birds are more vulnerable to hunting pressure when they are feeding away from the less accessible saltmarshes, but it also means they are adapting to changing conditions, which will help the species long-term chances for survival.

Development of wildlife refuges along the birds' winter habitat has been a likely catalyst for this change. Hundreds of thousands of waterfowl gather each winter in coastal refuges such as Bombay Hook in Delaware, Chincoteague and Back Bay in Virginia, and Mattamuskeet and Pea Island in North Carolina. Farmland is a short flight from most of these sanctuaries, and the proliferation of grain crops has encouraged the waterfowl to leave the refuges for feeding forays to nearby fields. It is not inconceivable that the snow's changing feeding behavior is a learned response, derived from its close association with other waterfowl on the refuges.

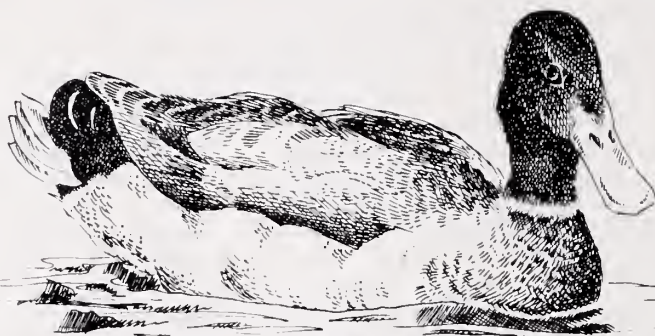
Whatever the reason, the good news is that these graceful white birds from the far north are back, and waterfowlers along Virginia's coast have reason to rejoice. Not only are the snows challenging game and excellent table fare, but the experience of hunting them is something special. To know something of the history of these birds, and then to watch them come in to your decoys spread through the early morning mist creates an indelible bond between the hunter and the game. At moments like these the wildness and nobility of these great birds seems almost tangible. It is one of the special experiences of waterfowling. □

You Never Know

*The unexpected is a vital part
of jump shooting ducks.*

by Bob Gooch





Jim, in the bow of the canoe, twisted his head, placed a gloved finger to his lips, and held up two fingers. The message was clear. Ahead in the soupy mist that clung tenaciously to the river were a couple of ducks!

Ever so carefully I eased up on the paddling, allowing the canoe to drift with the current. An occasional dip of the paddle to keep the canoe on course broke the quiet, but otherwise we moved silently with the river, the wet mist swirling about our heads. Jim in the bow was ready, his new automatic clasped tightly in gloved hands, and from the stern I too peered intently into the heavy mist.

Suddenly there was a flurry of action downstream, the heartening sound of strong wings flailing the damp air, and the spray of icy December water kicked up by powerful webbed feet catapulting gray bodies toward airborne escape. But it was too late. Jim's automatic barked twice and a pair of birds splashed on the cold surface of the river.

"A double!" I chortled as I dug the paddle into the murky water and shot the canoe forward to retrieve the downed ducks.

We swapped positions in the canoe then, and later I added another bird to our bag, a brightly marked woodie drake that came barreling up the river barely skimming the surface. My load of 6's caught him head on as he flared at the sight of the canoe and its load of hunters.

We were blessed with near perfect jump-shooting conditions that early winter day on the Rivanna River. There was plenty of water in the river, so we could move silently without banging noisily on boulders lurking just beneath the surface, but better still, a heavy mist had greeted us at dawn when we launched our canoe. The soupy fog hung heavily in the river valley and covered the river. Visibility was poor and that was just what we needed to conceal our approach to the wary river ducks.

Unfortunately, such conditions are almost rare much of the waterfowl season. The successful jump shooter has to take what the weather offers and be guided accordingly.

Bluebird days, the nemesis of waterfowlers just about everywhere, are the least desirable, particularly when they are combined with low water that makes moving quietly difficult. The bright sunlight spotlights the hunter and his canoe or boat, reflects off of shiny gun barrels and even the hunter's upturned face. Cloudy days are much better, and a misty one is still better.

Most of us have to hunt when breaks in our busy lives allow it, however, and we rarely have the opportunity to choose the weather we prefer.

That day Jim and I bagged our ducks in the fog, we could have ignored the usual camouflage recommendations and hunted in a bright red canoe, but that is rarely the case.

All of the camouflage you can muster is never too much. This means camouflage jackets and trousers, cap or hat, gloves, and even a face mask of some kind. Check out the well-clothed spring turkey hunter and copy his attire, but brown would be the predominant color of the duck hunter as opposed to the green of the turkey hunter.

The camouflage should also include the gun and canoe or boat if possible. Camouflage tape can be applied to the gun, and the boat or canoe can be painted.

Many successful hunters do not go this far, I must admit, usually limiting their camouflage to their jacket, trousers, and cap or hat. Gloves of subdued colors are a good substitute and a broad-brimmed hat or cap will help shadow the face. The advantages of taping a shiny gun are hard to dispute, however, as nothing is more conspicuous on a sun-filled day. The same is true of the boat or canoe. Bright colors can be fatal.

My battered and dented aluminum canoe is not camouflaged, but years and oxidation have rendered it a dull gray that does not reflect light. Plastic or wood, incidentally, would be a better

(Preceding page) A foggy day on the river is ideal for jump shooting ducks.

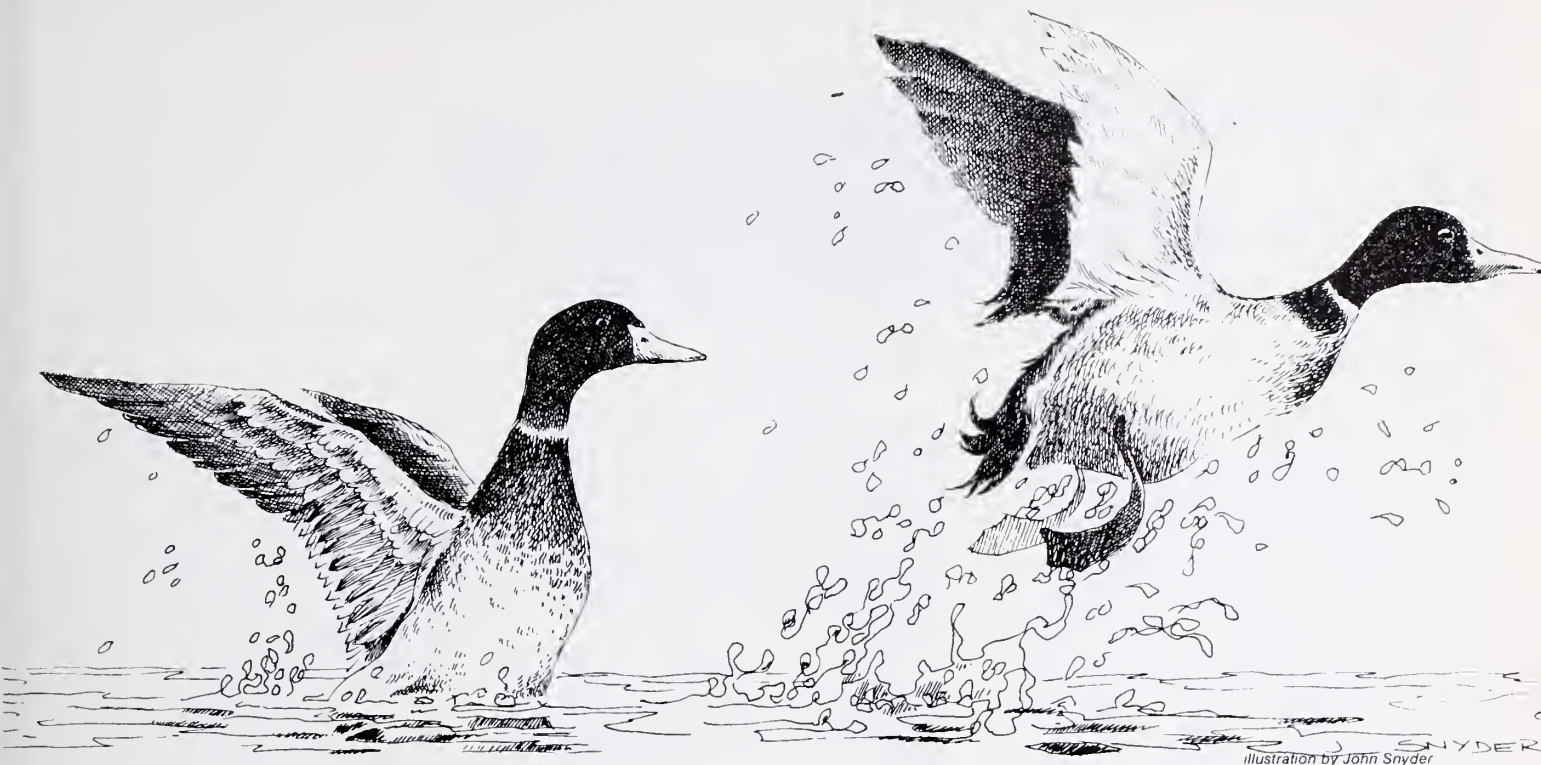


Illustration by John Snyder

choice than the noisy aluminum, but I'm not in the market for a new canoe. Some hunters drape camouflage nets or brush over the bows of their boats or canoes even though it can be a bother, particularly in fast water. If you modify a boat this way, and use it east of I-95 you will need a floating blind license.

While a jon boat may offer a more stable shooting platform than the canoe, the canoe is more maneuverable and easier for the one paddler to handle. Jump shooting is usually done by two-hunter teams with one handling the craft from the stern and the other shooting from the bow. The canoe favors this.

On that misty December day, Jim and I could have moved boldly down the middle of the river and enjoyed success, but on most days the jump shooter has to take advantage of all the concealment he can locate. Fortunately, most winding rivers offer a good bit of it, particularly when they flow through wooded country.

Bend or curves in the stream provide the most obvious cover. Using a bend in the river is the time-honored way to sneak up on ducks feeding or resting on the water. By hugging the inside bank of a bend or curve, hunters can get within easy shooting range of birds hanging just around the bend, particularly those on the same side of the stream as the inside shore. Birds on the opposite bank of a shallow curve are more of a problem.

Bends or curves in a stream are not,

of course, always available, and on long straight stretches of a stream many ducks are going to flush well beyond range. This is a fact of the jump shooter's life.

Even on those straight stretches, however, there will be birds, usually singles or pairs, feeding or resting near the shore, often in the protection of tiny coves or brush or vegetation. By hugging the shoreline, the hunter can often get within the range of these birds. All things being equal, the shaded shoreline is the best route because of the concealment the shadows offer. There is the undisputable fact, however, that on cold, sunny days, the birds may prefer the warmth of the sun on the other side of the river or stream. That presents a dilemma the hunter has to

"You never know what will flush before your boat or canoe on a good inland river."

solve on the spot. If he is aware of ducks on the sunny side of a river, then that is where he will hunt. Fortunately, on cloudy days this is not a problem.

Most rivers have sizeable feeder streams or tributaries that often provide good feeding or resting areas, and the hunter will want to approach these from the side of the river from which they enter.

Fallen trees sprawled well out into a stream can provide good cover for approaching ducks, and the birds often use this cover for resting on the downstream side where they are protected from the current. Such cover should be approached cautiously and expectantly.

Jump shooting for ducks is much like walking up grouse or other upland birds. The experienced waterfowler may know where to expect birds, but he is never sure and for that reason carries his gun at the ready position just as the upland hunter does. He is always ready for the most unexpected shot. That's why it is called jump shooting. This is entirely different from the blind hunter who usually spots the birds in the distance and waits for them to decoy or fly past his blind.

Wood ducks are one of the most popular species among the jump shooters, but blacks and mallards are also common. Over the years I've also bagged gadwall, teal and other species. You never know what will flush before your boat or canoe on a good inland river.

The species, like the sudden flush of the birds, can furnish the unexpected. That's one of the joys of jump shooting. □

October Journal

Smoking Fish: A Tried and True System

The big fillets smelled strong even when they came out of the freezer. My nephew Tim had caught the fish, a 12 lb. blue, trolling a big spoon one day early in May. We had eaten the top half of the fish that night. These fillets were the bottom halves of each side of the fish, including the belly meat around the rib cage. The fish had had a couple of oily menhaden in its stomach, enough to give these fillets a strong taste even when fresh. Now it was November, and I could just imagine how fishy the fillets would taste if broiled or baked. But we hadn't saved them to cook for dinner. They were going to be smoked and then made into a spread for Thanksgiving hors d'oeuvres.

The smoking procedure outlined below is simple, effective, and proven. It works well enough with fresh fillets, but it also does great things with fillets that have been frozen too long for conventional cooking. The fishy taste disappears as the oils in the flesh take up the flavor of the smoke.

That flavor is strong, probably an acquired taste. Smoked fish is too rich for everyday food in today's diet, but it is a great treat on special occasions.

Equipment and Materials Needed

Equipment

- covered charcoal cooker
- charcoal and lighter fluid
- hardwood chunks
- salt
- sugar
- large mixing bowl (for bringing and for mixing spread)
- large spoon for mixing

Materials

- 1 to 3 pounds of skinned fillets (catfish, trout, bluefish, carp, eel)
- 1 pint of sour cream for each pound of fillets
- 1 small onion, chopped, per 2 pounds of fillets
- juice of 1 lemon per pound of fillets

Selection and Cleaning

Rich and oily fish smoke best. Big trout, catfish, and bluefish are my

by John Page Williams
Assistant Vice President,
Chesapeake Bay Foundation

(This recipe has become a standard feature of receptions held by The Chesapeake Bay Foundation)

favorites. Blues smoke well even after they have been frozen a long time and have gotten a strong taste. Carp and eels also can be smoked. Lean fish like flounder are not good for smoking. Whatever fish is chosen should be filleted and skinned. A pound of raw fillets will yield about 1½ pints of spread.

A good way to treat big blues and trout is to split their fillets lengthwise. Use the top halves for broiling, grilling, and baking. Save the bottom halves for smoking.

Brining

Cover the fillets with a dry mixture of half salt and half sugar in a bowl or a glass baking dish. Layer them with more salt and sugar, if necessary. The mixture will draw moisture out of the fillets and toughen them so that they do not fall apart in the cooker.

Brine small fish like snapper blues (¾-1 lb.) for 1 hour, larger fish like big blues (10 lbs and over) for 3½ to 4 hours. For fish in between, work out the time proportionately. It is not precise. Fillets should be tougher than when fresh but still easily compressible between thumb and forefinger. Smoking experience will bring a feel for timing and texture. Rinse the fillets and carry them out to the smoker.

Smoking

Build a small charcoal fire on one side of a covered charcoal cooker. Open the draft on the fire side and close it on the other if possible. When the coals are hot, put several chunks of hardwood on them. Keep the fire confined to one side of the cooker. The size of the chunks and the number of them will vary with the size of the cooker. Use the largest ones you can so that the fire will last as long as possible.

Hickory and apple are standard smoking woods, and oak works well too, but any dense hardwood will serve in a pinch. Avoid pine and other conifers, as they will give the fish a resinous

flavor. Tradition calls for green wood, or at least wood that has been soaked in water, but regulating the draft on the smoker carefully will yield thick smoke even with dry, well-cured wood.

Once the cooker is smoking heavily, put the fillets on the grill on the side of the cooker opposite the fire. That way, the fillets will bake slowly in the smoke instead of being seared over the fire.

As a beginning rule of thumb, smoke the fillets for about half an hour longer than you brined them (hence 1½ hours for snapper blues, 4-4½ hours for big blues and trout). Check the fire every hour or so and add wood as necessary to keep it smoking heavily. Keep the draft closed as far as possible without putting out the fire. This is a low-temperature, slow-cooking process.

When properly smoked, the fillets will be deep golden brown on the top while still moist underneath and inside. At this point, close down the drafts on the cooker, remove the fillets, and allow to cool.

Mixing the Spread

Tear the smoked fillets into small pieces and drop them into a large bowl. Add half a small chopped onion, the juice of one lemon, and one pint of sour cream for each pound of raw fillets that you started with. Mix well. The consistency should be firm enough to spread with a knife.

Smoked fish spread does well on crackers when served as an hors d'oeuvre. It also makes a fine sandwich on dark bread with lettuce or alfalfa sprouts. It is an excellent filling for an omelette.

Cleaning Up

Unless the cooker is to be used for nothing but smoking, you'll want to clean it up. Scrape fish scraps off the grill with a spatula, a wire brush, and a scouring pad. Then clean out the lid with oven cleaner.

Good fishing, good smoking, and good eating! □



Book Reviews

America's Favorite Backyard Wildlife

Years and years ago when I was a student studying wildlife management and natural resources, one of the first terms I learned was "anthropomorphism." It's a hard one to spell and a harder one to say. Basically, it means giving an animal human characteristics. "Bambi" is not real.

Although the authors of *America's Favorite Backyard Wildlife* do not blatantly violate good taste by anthropomorphizing the subjects of their book, they get close to it.

The book is a well constructed and thought out one that discusses those species most readily found in habitats close to home. The Harrisons', both accomplished naturalists, photographers and writers, have combined their talents for this effort. Unfortunately, this is one case where the whole is less than its parts.

I expected better. The text is just too cutesy. Chipmunks referred to as "chippies," rabbits as "powder puffs in the pea patch" and flying squirrels as "pixies of the night." Come on.

Here's a paragraph from 'Raccoons, Masked Rascalion':

There's no doubt that raccoons have personality plus. Writing in Smithsonian, A.B.C. Whipple told of an 'indulgent host who claims to have been regularly visited by a raccoon that sits on his sofa watching television, yawning during commercials and on occasion going over to set to switch channels.' Raccoons do not care if the TV is color or black-and-white, he pointed out. They are color-blind.

But enough negativism. *America's Favorite Backyard Wildlife* is a nice complimentary book for reference material. Many of the anecdotes were enjoyable and do lend insight to the animal discussed. It's a good book for quick easy reading when a particular animal is sighted. There's comments

from a variety of friends as well as from professional wildlifers.

Photography is a strong ingredient for this book. With a thorough study of black and white photos and a small center section of color photos, the reader receives a nice referral of pictures.

If you're casually interested in the study of wildlife you'll want to take a look at *Favorite Wildlife*. It provides pleasant reading, a few new terms, good photography and nice composition.

If you're professionally engaged in the field, or have some experience in the outdoor sports, well . . .

America's Favorite Backyard Wildlife by Kit and George Harrison
Simon and Schuster, New York
\$16.95

A Naturalist's Blue Ridge Parkway

It's nice to receive a book in which the author has done his homework, and *A Naturalist's Blue Ridge Parkway*, is certainly such a book. His opening line, "This book covers a wide range of subjects . . ." is an understatement. Catlin has produced a comprehensive, thorough and complete study of the extensive geological region, the Blue Ridge Mountain chain.

This is not a relaxing novel that the reader will want to pick up at lunch time. This book is best used as a study guide. So unless the reader is inclined to carry a set of binoculars, a notepad, and a camera into the field, the real impact of this book is wasted.

Parkway, includes a good blend of historical discussion with the rest of the context providing a better visitor's guide than you could find available today. I imagine that the book got its start during Catlin's six year work as a National Park Service naturalist. It is divided into sections, each serving a specific subject. There are sections on wildflowers, insects and identifiable birds.

Uniquely, the final section is titled, "Humans." It is an interesting account of man's interaction and impact on the geological wonders of this region.

Catlin's book is replete with high-quality black and white photos and excellent color photos in the center section. The illustrations are the only weakness of the book. The pen and ink drawings are so basic as to take away from the polished text and good photography. It would have been better to have omitted them entirely.

A glossy, well-designed cover, featuring a photograph by Catlin, rounds out the package. *A Naturalist's Blue Ridge Parkway* is perfect for the sight-seer and natural history student. The appendix provides checklists for ferns, wildflowers, trees, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. This book should provide an extensive guide to the Parkway for the expert and novice alike.

A Naturalist's Blue Ridge Parkway
by David T. Catlin
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
268 pages; \$18.95 (hardcover); \$7.95 (paperback)

The Modern World of Coon Hunting

One of the many things that we as sportsmen can be proud of is always having an interest in related field sports. Hunting shows get their share of dedicated fishermen; waterfowl shows draw viewers who wouldn't know which end of a duck call to blow, any better than some shotgunners would know what "yarak" refers to in falconry. But we go to these events. We read the articles, and we look at the sporting goods equipment. The bottom line is that we enjoy our fellow sportsman's pursuits even if it isn't one of our own.

The Modern World of Coon Hunting is another means of involving ourselves

October Journal

in related interests. The book is very good. "Greenie" Grewell thoroughly covers all aspects of the sport with an enthusiastic familiarity that is compelling.

There are chapters that study a variety of components that make coon hunting, or any sport for that matter, the safe and enjoyable business that it is. Like the chapter titled, "Thoughts on Dog Care." The author give his, as well as a professional research veterinarian's advice on looking after your most important hunting partner, the dog.

Here is an excerpt from the chapter titled, "Conversation Coon Hunting." Grewell is speaking of himself and his hound:

I'm sure we both gave the appearance of worn out old soldiers who had seen their better days, whenever we would meander around the room. But, we liked this lodging. What with its woodsy atmosphere and the numerous pre-sixty hunting related photographs of both of us, our preferred hunting companions and outdoor haunts, places we'd been, and eoon we'd pursued and taken. Some of these captured moments were faded but not to be forgotten, as all four walls were neatly covered with photographically immortal memories, like sheets of wallpaper.

The three glass-fronted gun cabinets that hugged the east wall of the room were each eapable of protecting eight guns. And each cabinet was full of fire-arms. Some rifles, some shotguns. Some pumps, some automatics. Some single barrels, and some doubles. But each with deep rooted memories. All the fire-arms were in top shooting eondition. But, for me now, they were mostly eonversation pieces, as my abilities to handle them safely and shoot them with accuracy had been slowly hampered by failing eyesight and poor reflexes.

Coon Hunting, as reading material, is comfortable and educational. As thesis, it is interdisciplinary and thoughtful.

*I'm sure that anybody who enjoys the field sports will enjoy *The Modern World of Coon Hunting*.*

The Modern World of Coon Hunting
by Bob "Greenie" Grewell
B.H.P. Books, 93 E. Columbus St.
Mt. Sterling, OH 43143
191 pages; \$16.00

by Jeffrey M. Curtis



Grouse Go East

Commission biologists are busy these days transferring ruffed grouse from "the mountains to the shore." In an attempt to establish a population in Tidewater, the biologists have been trapping grouse from several sites west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The trapped grouse have been quickly moved to an eastern wildlife management area where they are released.

Current plans call for trapping up to sixty birds for a saturated release. With this type of release, biologists contend, the birds will have the best chance of adapting to their new home. The release area provides a mixture of open land, cutover areas and mature forests. The biologists expect to see positive results after two nesting seasons. □

About the Authors

Walter Smith has been banding and organizing Kiptopeke for 20 years. **Karen Terwilliger** is with the Commission's game division, working on the Eastern Shore. Writer, photographer and avid waterfowl hunter, **Curtis Badger** is editor of *Wildfowl Art*. **Randall Shank** is a freelance writer from Aylett, Virginia. He and his family enjoy getting out and enjoying the outdoors. **Steven Shires** competency with a camera is obvious, has is also a talented game warden who is currently stationed in Rockbridge County. **Bob Gooch** is a freelance outdoor writer and a regular contributor to *Virginia Wildlife*. □

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Antlerless Deer Tag Has Some Restrictions

The antlerless deer tag, included in the 1985 Big Game License, is valid throughout the firearms deer season in those counties with a **three** deer limit. Hunters may take one antlerless deer at any time during the season in these counties. Such deer must be tagged with Tag No. 3, which is designated for antlerless deer.

In the counties of Accomack, (except on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge), Charles City, New Kent and Northampton, hunters may use their remaining deer tags to take antlerless deer during the last six hunting days of the season.

In the counties of Greensville, Isle of Wight, Southampton, Surry, Sussex and in the city of Suffolk, hunters may use their remaining deer tags to take antlerless deer during the last 24 days of the season. □

Non-Game Fund Gaining on Half Million

The Non-Game and Endangered Species Program has received almost \$493,000 through voluntary contributions so far this year. The figures are almost \$50,000 higher than for the same time period of a year ago and are based on totals through August 30, 1985. The totals are based on state income tax returns processed by the Department of Taxation and private donations made by individuals through means other than the tax check-off.

The work of the program continues throughout the year and citizens can make tax deductible contributions throughout the year also. The successful year to date is a good indication that Virginians care about the work in the non-game area accomplished by the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries. For more information about the program, or to make a donation, contact the Education Division at the Commission, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104 □

Will Records Fall at Burke Lake?

As we go to press, Burke Lake in Fairfax County has produced 17 citation size musky, and Ed Steinkoenig, Commission biologist assigned to the lake, says that he fully expects to see a new state record to come from the lake any day now. Ed has his reasons, like the 29-pounder that he netted earlier this year—a fish that still lives in Burke Lake.

According to citation information through August, the lake has produced the fifth largest musky of the year, a 26-pound, 8-ounce monster caught by Brad Barto of Manassas. He used a Mepps #5 Aglia to bring in the 47-inch long trophy. Just missing the top ten on the citation list was David Pethel of Alexandria. Pethel caught a 21½-pound musky at Lake Burke for the 11th spot on the computer listing. While the minimum citation size listed for muskellunge is six pounds, all seventeen citation muskies taken from Burke Lake are ten pounds or more. □



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Bird of the Month

The Canada Goose

Adaptability. There, in a word, is the key to success in the natural world. The ability to adjust, to conform to a changing environment may mean the difference between extinction and prosperity. In the case of the Canada goose, its successful adaptation to the modern practices of agriculture has brought prosperity beyond any expectation.

Population surveys have indicated that these geese have doubled their numbers between 1955 and 1974. And, in instances where counts were made prior to 1955, the increase is even more spectacular. In January of 1948, a Fish and Wildlife Service census listed 179,000 Canadas in the Atlantic Flyway. In 1974, the count for this region totalled 760,000 birds.

It was the ability to change its diet that brought such good fortune to the Canada goose. Of necessity and convenience, Canadas have turned from natural, aquatic plant food to grain and cereals, grown as agricultural crops. The switch has changed both migration and wintering patterns.

Geese that once wintered in the marshes of the Carolinas are now remaining farther north, along the shores of the Chesapeake and on the Delmarva peninsula. There, they find conditions ideal: extensive fields of grain, adjacent to large open bodies of water where they can rest in security.

And once geese become accustomed to an area, be it a wintering or a summering ground, they show a strong propensity to return there annually. Banding and color marking studies have shown that they even use the same migration routes, stopping each year at the same lay-over points.

So attached have they become to certain geographical areas, that biologists have separated them into various distinct "populations," based, not on taxonomic differences, but on range and migratory movements. Cohesive and independent, each group has its own breeding range, migratory corridor and wintering territory. All of the units combine to give the Canada goose a continent-wide distribution. They can

be found, in one season or another, in every state and province in North America.

The Canadas that winter in Virginia belong to the "mid-Atlantic" population. They breed principally on the tundra that fringes northern Quebec, on the Ungavan Peninsula. After nesting, they move south along the eastern shore of Hudson Bay and James Bay, across central New York and eastern Pennsylvania to the Chesapeake Bay. From there they disperse into coastal Virginia and the Carolinas.

At one time, the principal wintering ground for this mid-Atlantic population was eastern North Carolina, with a nucleus at the Mattamuskeet National Refuge. Since the mid-sixties, many of these Carolina birds have moved to Maryland and Delaware. A segment of this population, averaging about 60,000 birds, winters along the Virginia coast, especially at Back Bay Refuge.

There are scattered instances of Canada geese remaining to nest in Virginia. These are most likely birds that have escaped from captivity or offsprings from captives. Some are artificially introduced, and others have been injured, and unable to migrate. Several pairs nest annually at Chincoteague and they nest regularly at Back

Bay and Hog Island. Inland, on the Piedmont, there are records for Albemarle, Louisa and Clarke counties.

Most of Virginia's geese belong to the "interior" race, differentiated by taxonomists from the "Atlantic" race by their slightly smaller size and overall darker appearance. The other races (there are twelve presently recognized) are primarily western in distribution. Most would not be recognizable in the field, but one, the very small cackling goose, is but half the size of the others. Every few years one turns up in the east, mingling with its larger brethren.

Though these various races present a diversity of size and coloration, the plumages of individual geese do not vary with age or sex, as they do with most waterfowl. There is no way to tell, in the field, the males from the females or the immatures. Nor is there a difference in the eclipse or moulting plumage. Nearly everyone recognizes immediately the black head and neck, with white cheek patch. And nearly everyone is stirred by their clear, resonant honking as they trace their way across the sky in characteristic V-shaped formation. □

by John W. Taylor



